

DISCUSSION OF GRAVE AND HELL

The grave - we are all familiar with that. That is the place in which the body of a dead person is placed.

Hell - here the translators have problems. The term is in both the Old and New Testaments. In Luke 16 the last of verse 22 says, "And the rich man also died and was buried, and being in torments in hell" - King James translation. The Greek text has "Hades."

In Matthew 5:22: "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be subjected to the judgment."

There it refers to the local Jewish court. There were twenty-three members of that court and if you were angry with your brother without a cause you were subject to the judgment of the local Jewish court. Going on: "And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' [that is, 'empty headed'] shall be subjected to the danger of the council." That refers to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem which had seventy members - the head of all the local courts. "But whoever says 'fool' [that is, 'Godless fellow'] shall be subjected to hell fire." "Hell fire" is the word "Gehenna."

That refers to a geographical location in the Old Testament, the Valley of Hinnon. The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by some valleys: the Kidron Valley, the Tyropean Valley and the Hinnon Valley. "Ge" is the word for valley, and "Hinnon" is the name of that place, the sons of Hinnon. That was where they threw all the trash and it was always burning. In this passage it is not referring to that physical place, but it uses this term to refer to the eternal fires of hell.

Another reference is in Psalm 16:10: "For You will not leave my soul in [King James has "hell"]. That is the Hebrew word "Sheol." So there are three words that on occasions are translated "hell." It would help in our understanding if those three words - Hades, Gehenna and Sheol - were inserted into the margins of our Bibles in the proper places.

Question re Luke 16, and beginning with verse 19.

Here we have a place called "Hades," and we are told that there is a great gulf fixed between two sections. It believe it is correct to say that the unsaved went into the lower place of torment and the saved went into the upper place of comfort, and they could not cross the gulf to move from one to the other. The upper section was called "Abraham's bosom." I believe it was also Paradise. Christ on the cross said to the thief, "Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." I hasten to add that many believe that when Christ died He went immediately into Heaven. But Scripture says that when Christ died He went for three days and three nights into the heart of the earth. That is not just six feet under or into a cave. That is in the heart of the earth. Therefore, He went down into Hades, into Paradise. The Apostles' Creed says, "He descended into hell." This is not Satan's playhouse; this is God's prison house, with the upper portion Paradise. When Christ ascended He took those believers with Him into Heaven, so now, "absent from the body, present with the Lord."

[See discussion on Sheol and Hades.]

SHEOL - HADES

by Willis E. Bishop
(from study in Ezekiel)

Some people believe that when Old Testament believers died they went directly to heaven and also that Christ, when He died on the cross, went directly to heaven.

In Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27 we find that the Sheol of the Old Testament is the Hades of the New Testament. Psalm 16:10 says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol." That verse is quoted in Acts 2:27, and it is applied directly to Christ, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hades." This verifies that the Sheol of the Old Testament is the Hades of the New Testament.

In Matthew 12 verse 40 Christ said, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." What we do with that verse makes a difference as to how we understand Sheol and Hades.

What is the heart of the earth? It is not just a grave dug from the surface. As I understand the word "heart," it means the center. And so somewhere in the center of the earth Christ spent three days and three nights. In other words, the heart of the earth is not heaven. When Christ died He did not go directly to heaven but to the heart of the earth.

At the time of Christ, Paradise was located there [the heart of the earth]. The criminal on the cross, Luke 23:43, turned to Christ and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Christ answered him and said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." So, somewhere in the heart of the earth was Paradise. Christ descended to the heart of the earth, to Paradise, and He assured the criminal that because he had believed on Him he would also be there with Him, in Paradise.

That certainly was not a place of torment. In Luke 16 we find the story of Lazarus and the rich man. That is not a parable, it was an actual incident. Even if it were a parable it would teach truth. In that story the rich man died and went to Hades (New Testament term), and in torment he lifted up his eyes. In Hades there is a place of Paradise and a place of torment. The rich man, in torment, looked across what the Scripture calls "a great gulf fixed" and saw Abraham and Lazarus in comfort. The rich man was not permitted to go into the upper portion and Lazarus could not go into the lower portion.

Q. Are you implying that is in the bowels of the earth?

A. Yes. It is the heart of the earth. How you understand "Hades" determines how you understand "the heart of the earth." It wouldn't be just on the surface [as a grave]. It wouldn't be in heaven because Christ said He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. So I believe it is somewhere in the bowels of the earth.

Q. That is where the group that contended with Moses went?

A. You are referring to Korah and his rebellion. The Lord did a new thing, He opened earth and they went down alive. That is where they went. All believers in the Old Testament went to Paradise, the place of comfort, and the unbelievers went to the place of torment, or lower Sheol.

Q. Now when [believers] die they go to heaven.

A. You are coming to the "now" part.

C. Before we come there I'd like to make an observation. We think of the heart as being molten, like molten lava, being so hot. But we have a great God who could have reserved one section of it for Paradise as a place of comfort.

A. A God who "spoke and the worlds were created" would have no problem with making a place such as Paradise.

This teaches for both the saved and the unsaved a conscious existence after death. That is either a place of comfort or of torment. It is a place of mental activity and sight. It is not soul sleep or annihilation. And there is no release from this place of torment.

Here are a few verses regarding the believers in the Old Testament:

Isaiah 57:2: "The righteous are at peace and rest."

Numbers 23:10: "Let me die the death of the righteous."

Psalms 116:15, which we sometimes hear at funerals:

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

Compare the occasional hope of Job in connection with life after death.

I don't find any Old Testament Scripture that tells of Old Testament believers going to heaven at the time of death. When Joseph's brothers tossed him into a pit and later sold him to some traders who were going down to Egypt, they took a blood-stained garment back to Jacob, and Jacob thought that wild beasts had killed him (Genesis 37). Jacob mourned and said, "I will go down to Sheol to be with him." This was Jacob's insight into life after death.

In the New Testament we turn to Paul in II Corinthians 12 where he says, "I knew a man, whether in the body or out of the body I could not tell, such an one caught up to the third heaven ... into Paradise." So at the time of Paul this Paradise had been moved to the third heaven. Now when believers are "absent from the body and present with the Lord," according to II Corinthians 12 and Philippians 1 and 2, and so on, they go immediately into heaven. That change took place with the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Eph. 4; II Cor. 5:8).

Finally, what about the lower part, Hades? In Revelation 20 we have the Lord's word on that.

Revelation 20:11: "And I saw a great white throne and the One who sat on it from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened, and another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books."

That One on the throne is the Lord Jesus Christ. In John chapter 5 Christ said, "All judgment has been committed unto the Son." So this is the Lord Jesus on the throne judging the dead out of the books that were there "according their works." In Luke 10 and 12 we find that judgment is according to their deeds, so there are degrees of punishment.

Rev. 20:13: "And the sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged each one according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life he was cast into the Lake of Fire."

So there is another place--the Lake of Fire. The inhabitants of Hades are taken out, they stand before the great white throne judgment, and those not found in the Book of Life are put into the Lake of Fire. That is the end of Hades.

Paradise has been changed with the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and Hades is now put into the Lake of Fire. From there we go into the eternity of the future.

In my library I used to have a book compiling the deathbed testimonies of saved and unsaved people. In many cases the testimony of the unsaved is that they realize already they are headed for the place of torment and can seemingly see it. However, we must be careful about the after-death experiences that we read about. Satan appears as an angel of light and deceives many. So we must stay with the testimony of Scripture.

Discussion re location of heaven.

Q. In Isaiah 14:13 and 14 it says, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds." Is that a different connotation?

A. Isaiah chapters 13 and 14 are talking about a fellow who is king of Babylon, and he is claiming he will go up and take the place of God, but instead, (chapter 14 verse 15), he will be "brought down to Sheol." This is a reference to the king of Babylon.

Q. re the term "ascend."

A. The location of heaven is another matter. For example, Christ ascended to heaven. Where is heaven? We have some inferences with regard to that. For example, wherever anyone is located on the sphere of the earth he goes up--up north, up east, up west, up south. But, if heaven is in the north, no matter where the geographical location is, ascension to the north is up. So I suggest that quite likely heaven is some place in the north.

A number of years ago they opened some cameras on some telescopes for a 24-hour period and found that there was an open space in the north in the heavens. That doesn't prove or disprove where heaven is. But see Isaiah 14:13 for a suggestion: "I will ascend into heaven ... above the stars of God ... in the "recesses" ("uttermost parts") of the north."

C. It's out of this world.

A. That's for sure.

Q. Is it possible that the Lake of Fire is still going to be in the center of the earth? When Satan is thrown into hell, as I remember, the earth is opened up. Are there words something like that?

A. The bottomless pit? Hades is in the center of the earth and I don't think Satan ever makes it into Hades, from the history of the Scripture. When Christ speaks of unbelievers being put into the place that was prepared for the devil and his angels, there is no mention of its location. Whether it is in the heart of the earth, or a renovated Hades, I rather doubt that, because Hades is taken and put into the Lake of Fire, according to Revelation chapter 20. I am reasonably certain that Satan is never put into Hades (or Sheol), but that Christ is there referring to the fact that the devil and his angels will be put into the Lake of Fire and that unbelievers will eventually be put into the same place.

C. Satan is never in control of Hades, or Hell.

A. No, it is not Satan's playhouse but God's prison house.

Q. That's to be forever and ever and no end?

A. It says forever and ever. Revelation 20:10: "And the devil who deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." The Greek has it, "into the ages of the ages."

The word that is translated "everlasting punishment" is also used of the word that describes the "everlasting God." So as long as God exists punishment will exist. As awful as it is to think about, if we stay with the clear words of Scripture it is everlasting. On that basis, anyone who rejects Christ for a little enjoyment in this life is about as foolish as you can get when Christ offers a free gift of everlasting life.

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